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Summary record of the 19th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 17 October 2006, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Ballesteros (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Costa Rica)

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In the absence of Mr. Al Bayati (Iraq), Mr. Ballesteros (Costa Rica), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 64: Indigenous issues (*continued*) (A/61/490)

(a) Indigenous issues (*continued*) (A/61/376)

(b) Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (*continued*)

1. **Mr. U Kyi Thein** (Myanmar) said that ethnic groups, or national races, as they were called in Myanmar, constituted 40 per cent of the population and lived mainly in the remote border areas. A separate Government ministry had been established in 1992 to promote their well-being. Its main objectives were to bring about economic and social development in the regions inhabited by the national races; to preserve their culture, literature and customs; to strengthen amity among the national races; to eradicate opium poppy cultivation and provide alternative means of livelihood; and to maintain security, regional peace and tranquillity.

2. Three national programmes — the Border Development Programme, the 24 Special Development Zones programme and the Integrated Rural Development Plan — to complement the work of that ministry were being implemented. Vast transformations were taking place in those regions, with the building of new roads, bridges, small-scale hydroelectric power plants, post and telegraph offices and telephone exchanges. The education and health sector had also seen major improvements, with the building of new schools, hospitals, dispensaries and health centres and the opening of agricultural service offices, farms, dams and tractor camps. The national races were also participating actively in the political process.

3. **Mr. Cumberbach Miguén** (Cuba) said that while much had been achieved during the First International Decade much remained to be done. One of the most important outcomes of the Second Decade would likely be the adoption of the draft United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and he called on all delegations to support it when it came before the General Assembly.

4. The South-South collaboration in which Cuba had engaged with many developing countries, particularly in Latin America, was bringing benefits to many indigenous communities in the area of health and literacy. Many young people from those communities had received bursaries to study at Cuban universities to become doctors, engineers and specialists in other fields of knowledge. The Programme of Action for the Second Decade should be given all the necessary support to allow the United Nations to continue playing a crucial role in the adoption of measures that would benefit indigenous people.

5. **Ms. Taracena Secaira** (Guatemala) said that her Government had taken various measures to promote the rights of indigenous people through permanent training and education programmes implemented by different Maya, Garifuna and Xinka organizations and coordinated by the Presidential Commission against Racism and Discrimination (CODIRSA) and other Government agencies. Through CODIRSA the Government implemented public policies to combat racism, exclusion and discrimination against indigenous people. The Office for the Defence of Indigenous Women's Rights (DEMI) ran training and self-esteem programmes to combat domestic violence and help indigenous women develop and participate actively in communal, municipal and national decision-making processes.

6. Guatemala had made considerable progress on the issue of political participation: members of indigenous communities were represented in the Congress and held decision-making positions in various State institutions and municipal governments and the country had hosted large-scale national and international conferences on the subject of indigenous people. The United Nations had undertaken major activities on the issue, including the establishment of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, one of whose members was a Quiche Maya from Guatemala. Guatemala hoped that the General Assembly would adopt the draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as soon as possible.

7. **Mr. Pradip Nepal** (Nepal) said that his country was committed to the development and welfare of ethnic and indigenous people. The participation of indigenous people at meetings of the United Nations and its subsidiary bodies had increased and advanced the interests of indigenous people at national, regional and international levels. Nepal firmly believed that the

draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples could play a significant role as a frame of reference for the issues of indigenous people and it supported the recommendation of the Human Rights Council that the General Assembly endorse the adoption of the draft Declaration. In order to build on the momentum generated by the adoption of the draft Declaration, the international community should extend its support and cooperation to Member States so that they could take the necessary legislative and institutional measures at the national level. In this context, it should provide financial and technical support to developing countries, particularly least developed countries, and give special attention to countries emerging from conflict and violence.

8. With regard to the overall development of its various ethnic and indigenous people, Nepal had taken a number of legal, administrative and institutional measures to safeguard their interests and to promote their progress and prosperity. It had put in place laws, policies and strategies to implement constitutional and legislative measures as well as international instruments. The Government had placed a high priority on educational opportunities, health services, access to credit and protection of traditional knowledge and skills. It was also making genuine efforts to end all forms of discrimination or marginalization of indigenous people and was fully committed to protecting and promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms for all people, including ethnic and indigenous groups.

9. **Mr. Baja** (Philippines) said that the Philippine Constitution recognized and promoted the rights of indigenous cultural communities within the framework of national unity and development. The country's policies and actions to operationalize that commitment were based on human rights and the development of those communities. The centrepiece of its work was securing land for those communities and implementing a framework plan for the sustainable development and protection of ancestral domains.

10. The Government also provided livelihood projects that promoted self-sufficiency and were buttressed by capacity-building programmes and modules, such as entrepreneurial training, agro-industrial technology transfer, technical and financial cooperative assistance and social infrastructure support services. In the health sector, the National Commission on Indigenous People partnered with the Department of Health to promote and protect indigenous people's right to health, particularly through the elimination of tuberculosis, malaria and filariasis. In the area of education, a culture-sensitive curriculum had been developed for indigenous students and educational assistance was provided to students at the elementary, high school and college levels.

11. Other key initiatives had been undertaken to address human rights violations and emergency situations facing indigenous communities. For example, the National Commission had been strengthening its quick response unit, which was responsible for intervening in critical situations such as disasters, and had been enhancing the capability of the Office of Empowerment and Human Rights and the Legal Affairs Office to attend to reports of human rights violations against indigenous people. The Philippines looked forward to the adoption of the draft Declaration by the General Assembly.

12. **Mr. Droszewski** (France) welcomed the adoption by the Human Rights Council of the draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the culmination of a 20-year process, and expressed the hope that the Declaration would be adopted by the General Assembly. While the text was not perfect, his delegation believed that it was the best possible compromise, and would pave the way to better protection and promotion of the rights of indigenous peoples.

13. France was directly concerned with the issue because of the indigenous populations in its overseas territories, where it conducted programmes for their economic and social development appropriate to their specific needs and cultures. France would continue to provide financial support to the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, and to support the work of the Coordinator of the Decade. He reaffirmed his Government's support for international human rights standards and democratic values, which the Declaration was intended to strengthen.

14. **Ms. Shoman** (Belize) speaking on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that the activities of the first International Decade of the World's Indigenous People had brought the situation of indigenous people onto the international agenda, and had resulted in a growing understanding of the obstacles they faced in preserving their culture, livelihood and communities, while improving their

living conditions. One of the greatest achievements of the Decade had been the establishment of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. The Forum could play an important role in facilitating development initiatives for the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean, through advocacy for greater coordination between United Nations agencies in order to reduce duplication of effort. It could also encourage the collection of reliable data on the indigenous people of the region so that their problems could be more precisely addressed.

15. CARICOM hoped that the plan of action for the second Decade would take into account the outcome of the deliberations in the Permanent Forum. The second Decade was intended to strengthen further international cooperation to solve the problems faced by indigenous people in such areas as culture, education, health, human rights, the environment and social and economic development, by means of action-oriented programmes and projects, increased technical assistance and standard-setting activities.

16. Although important advances had been made during the first Decade, the report of the High Commissioner for Human Rights pointed out the indigenous peoples in many countries continued to be among the poorest and most marginalized. Much remained to be done to protect them from human rights violations, alleviate their poverty and safeguard them against discrimination.

17. CARICOM saw itself playing an important role in the development of the world's indigenous peoples. Indigenous people should be represented in Government and civil society organizations in order to increase consultation and collaboration. Only through dialogue could each side understand the challenges faced by the other. Indigenous people had an understanding of the harmony between humans and the environment and had taught others to better appreciate the gifts of nature; that was just a small part of the contributions of indigenous people to sustainable development. Therefore, it was important to strengthen the human and institutional capacities of indigenous people so as to allow them more participation in decision-making.

18. **Ms. Mballa Eyenga** (Cameroon) welcomed the proclamation of the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples, which was expected to free indigenous groups from poverty and protect their rights, including the right to development and education, and especially the right to their cultural identity. As a member of the Human Rights Council, Cameroon had supported the adoption of the draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and looked forward to its adoption in the General Assembly.

19. The Constitution of Cameroon provided for protection of the rights of minorities, which extended to the Pygmy and Mbororo ethnic groups present in Cameroon and Central Africa in general. The Government had taken a number of measures to ensure that protection, including an awareness-raising campaign regarding their civil and political rights, issuing citizenship identity cards to enable them to participate in elections and protecting their traditional environment and lands. For example, the route of the Chad-Cameroon oil pipeline project had been changed so that it would not destroy Pygmy villages or hunting grounds.

20. Cameroon hoped that the second Decade would lead to the integration of indigenous groups into the daily life of the country and thereby demonstrate acceptance of differences, without which there would be neither peace nor dialogue within and among States.

The meeting rose at 11.10 a.m.